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**ABSTRACT**

Little attention has been directed to the use of power in dating realtionships. Recently, however, emphasis has shifted to studying dyadic processes, e.g., social exchange, self-disclosure, and the use of power, in relation to interpersonal relationships. To determine: (1) whether sex or sex role is a better predictor of power tactics in a dating situation, (2) if power use is related to specific personality characteristics, and (3) if direct power tactics are associated with higher levels of satisfaction in relationships, subjects (N=133 undergraduates) completed a questionnaire in which they described a current or recent dating relationship, answered questions about the length of and their level of satisfaction with the relationship, and responded to a list of 26 power strategies. Results indicated that the preference was for non-coercive and negotiation-oriented power tactics, inferring that these tactics might be the most available and successful in a voluntary, intimate relationship. Results confirmed that the type of power tactics used could be predicted from personality characteristics (e.g., persons with low need for dominance preferred acting helpless in order to get their way), and that the variations in preferred power use were better predicted by sex role than by sex (e.g., androgynous and masculine persons preferred the tactic of reasoning more than did feminine persons). Results also strongly support the theory that satisfaction is associated with the use of direct strategies. (PAS)

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2                   **Sex Role, Personality Needs, and Satisfaction**  
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## 1           Power Tactic Preference in Dating Relationships:

## 2           Sex Role, Personality Needs, and Satisfaction

3           The study of interpersonal attraction has long been a popular area  
4 of research in social psychology. Within the last ten years, however,  
5 there has been a major shift in emphasis in the field (Hinde, 1979). In  
6 the past, most of the research effort was directed at identifying the  
7 variables such as similarity and physical appearance which made one person  
8 more or less attractive to another (see Huston, 1974 for a review of these  
9 variables). More recently, however, the emphasis has shifted to studying  
10 dyadic processes such as social exchange and self disclosure (see Burgess  
11 and Huston, 1979, for a review). The current paper is concerned with  
12 another important dyadic process, the use of power, which can also be  
13 studied in the context of interpersonal attraction.

14          Power has been defined as the ability of one or more persons to in-  
15 duce compliance from another and has most often been studied in the context  
16 of small group and business settings (Tedeschi, Schlenker, & Bonoma, 1973).  
17 A substantial amount of research has also been done on the use of power in  
18 family and marital relationships (see McDonald, 1980, for a review).  
19 Little attention, however, has been directed at the use of power in dating  
20 relationships. This particular type of interpersonal situation might pro-  
21 vide interesting insights into power use, as the expression of power in  
22 such a relationship might well be different from that in more committed  
23 relationships such as marriage, or less intimate ones such as business.  
24 Issues that might be considered are: the types of power tactics charac-  
25 terizing dating relationships; the personality factors that predict the

1 type of power tactics used; and the relationship of power tactics to out-  
2 come measures such as satisfaction within the relationship.

3       A review of the few studies that have been done on power use in dating  
4 relationships indicates that most of the effort has been concerned with  
5 identifying types of power tactics used, and determining the factors that  
6 predict the actual use of these power tactics. One of these studies asked  
7 subjects to write short essays on how they got their way in a dating sit-  
8 uation (Falbo & Peplau, 1980). Thirteen different strategies were identified  
9 from these essays. A multidimensional scaling analysis of these strategies  
10 showed that there were two major dimensions: bilateral/unilateral and  
11 direct/indirect. An example of the bilateral/unilateral dimension would  
12 be negotiation versus doing what one wanted to do anyway. An example of  
13 the direct/indirect dimension would be asserting one's wishes loudly versus  
14 dropping hints. These strategies and dimensions are similar to the ones  
15 that Falbo (1977a) found in the essays of subjects who were describing their  
16 power tactics for people in general.

17       In addition to these findings, Falbo and Peplau (1980) noted that there  
18 were significant sex differences in the use of the power tactics. Males  
19 reported preferring bilateral-direct strategies while females preferred  
20 unilateral-indirect tactics. These findings supported those of Johnson  
21 (1976, 1978) who studied sex differences in preferred power use toward  
22 people in general. Using Raven's (1965) framework of six power bases,  
23 she also found substantial sex differences. Men were more likely to use  
24 reward, coercion, information, expert, and legitimate bases of power.  
25 Women were more apt to rely on referent, indirect, nagging, sexuality, and  
false information strategies.

1        This finding of sex differences in preferred power tactics in dating  
2 relationships is an interesting one, and warrants further study. One  
3 specific question is whether the differences in power tactic preference  
4 might not be better predicted by sex role than by sex. Recent research  
5 has suggested that the concepts of masculinity and femininity are social  
6 roles, or sets of particular psychological characteristics, which may or  
7 may not be associated with a specific biological sex (Bem, 1975; Spence,  
8 Helmreich, & Stapp, 1975). The hypothesis that sex role might be a better  
9 predictor of power use than sex has received partial support from a study  
10 by Falbo (1977b). She asked subjects to write an essay on how they got  
11 their way with people in general. She found that sex role, as assessed  
12 by the Bem Sex Role Inventory (1974), accounted for significantly more of  
13 the variance in power use than did sex. Feminine individuals were more  
14 likely to use tears, emotional alteration, and subtlety than were masculine  
15 and androgynous individuals, and less likely to use assertion.

16        The present study, therefore, seeks to determine whether sex or sex  
17 role is a better predictor of power tactics in a dating situation. Also,  
18 rather than use the essay approach used in past studies, the current re-  
19 search provided subjects with a list of power strategies compiled from  
20 the preceding investigations. In addition to the basic issue of whether  
21 sex or sex role is better able to predict power use, there are two other  
22 points considered in this study. Since the concept of sex role suggests  
23 that power use might be related to specific personality characteristics,  
24 a set of other personality variables was also included to determine their  
25 predictive ability. Finally, because Falbo and Peplau (1980) showed that

1 direct power tactics were associated with higher levels of satisfaction  
2 in relationships, the reported level of satisfaction and type of power  
3 tactic used was also considered in the present research.

#### 4 Method

##### 5 Subjects

6 One hundred and thirty-three undergraduates (71 male and 62 female)  
7 enrolled in introductory psychology participated as subjects in exchange  
8 for course credit.

##### 9 Materials and Procedure

10 All subjects completed a questionnaire which required them to de-  
11 scribe a current dating relationship, or if they were not involved in one,  
12 to describe a dating relationship that had occurred within the past two  
13 years. After answering questions concerning the length of this specified  
14 relationship and level of satisfaction, all subjects were provided with a  
15 list of 26 power strategies. This list (Table 1) was compiled from studies  
16 by Falbo and Peplau (1980), Falbo (1977a), and Johnson (1976). For each  
17 strategy, subjects were asked to indicate on a 10-point scale how frequently  
18 they had used that strategy (1 = never; 5 = 3-6/times a month; 10 = 7 or  
19 more times a month).

20 -----  
21 Insert Table 1 about here  
22 -----

23 In a mass testing of all introductory psychology students earlier in  
24 the semester, subjects had completed the Adjective Check List (ACL; Gough &  
25 Heilbrun, 1965) and the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI; Bem, 1974). The ACL

1 was coded for Murray's (1938) 15 need scales: achievement, dominance,  
2 endurance, order, intraception, nurturance, affiliation, heterosexuality,  
3 exhibition, autonomy, aggression, change, succorance, abasement, and  
4 deference. A median split procedure was used to score the BSRI, as ad-  
5 vocated by both Bem (1977) and Spence et al. (1974). The BSRI produces  
6 two scales, masculine and feminine. If subjects score over the median on  
7 both scales, they are classified as androgynous, and if they score below  
8 the median on both scales, as undifferentiated. A score above the median  
9 on the masculine scale and a score below the median on the feminine scale  
10 categorizes the subject as masculine, and the reverse coding situation,  
11 as feminine. The median of the masculine scale in the present study was  
12 5.05 and for the feminine scale, 4.95. The groups resulting from this  
13 classification were: androgynous,  $n = 33$  ( $M = 19$ ,  $F = 14$ ); undiffer-  
14 entiated,  $n = 30$  ( $M = 21$ ,  $F = 9$ ); masculine,  $n = 35$  ( $M = 25$ ,  $F = 10$ );  
15 and feminine,  $n = 35$  ( $M = 6$ ,  $F = 29$ ).

### 16 Results

17 Current relationships were reported by 91 subjects (44 male and 47  
18 female) or 68.4%. The remaining 42 subjects or 31.6% of the sample  
19 reported on a past relationship (27 male and 15 female). Preliminary  
20 analyses performed on the power use, sex role, need scales and satisfac-  
21 tion data indicated that individuals describing past relationships were  
22 not significantly different from subjects involved in current relation-  
23 ships. All analyses, therefore, are based on data collapsed across  
24 relationship type.  
25

### Power Tactic Preferences

The most commonly used power tactics in dating relationships were reasoning with partner ( $M = 6.3$ ); talking about their desires ( $M = 6.2$ ); telling their partner what they wanted ( $M = 6.0$ ); making a simple request ( $M = 5.9$ ); and putting their partner in a good mood ( $M = 5.3$ ). The five least frequently used power strategies were: using force ( $M = .1$ ); threatening to leave ( $M = .24$ ); acting helpless ( $M = .7$ ); avoiding one's partner ( $M = .8$ ); and crying ( $M = .9$ ). The average number of strategies used by each subject was 14.4.

### Sex Versus Sex Role Differences

A multivariate analysis of variance was run using sex and sex role as between factors, and the frequency ratings on the power strategies as the dependent measures. The main effect for sex role was significant (Wilks' Lambda Criterion = .33,  $F(26, 100) = 1.73$ ,  $p < .001$ . The main effect for sex (Wilks' Lambda Criterion = .76,  $F(26, 100) = 1.24$ , and the interaction were not significant (Wilks' Lambda Criterion = .53,  $F(78, 299) = .94$ . The four sex role types were significantly differentiated on six of the 26 power tactics (see Table 2). These power tactics were: reasoning with one's partner,  $F(7, 125) = 13.40$ ,  $p < .001$ ; talking matters over,  $F(7, 125) = 9.70$ ,  $p < .001$ ; telling one's partner what one desires,  $F(7, 125) = 4.14$ ,  $p < .01$ ; telling partner you have had more experience,  $F(7, 125) = 3.20$ ,  $p < .05$ ; putting one's partner in a good mood,  $F(7, 125) = 4.31$ ,  $p < .01$ ; and asserting one's wishes loudly,  $F(7, 125) = 3.15$ ,  $p < .05$ .

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Insert Table 2 about here  
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1 Separate analyses indicated that there was no significant difference in  
2 the number of power strategies used by sex role,  $F(3, 128) = 1.51$  or by  
3 sex,  $t(121) = .51$ .

#### 4 Personality Correlates

5 Subjects' responses on the 300-item ACL (Gough & Heilbrun, 1965)  
6 were scored for Murray's (1938) need scales. These need scales were then  
7 correlated with the relative frequency of use of the 26 power strategies.  
8 Only correlations significant at the .01 level are reported. Telling  
9 one's partner what was desired correlated with need for exhibition ( $r =$   
10  $.27$ ), need for dominance ( $r = .28$ ), and negatively with need for deference  
11 ( $r = -.27$ ). Acting helpless in order to get one's way was negatively  
12 correlated with need for dominance ( $r = -.27$ ), and positively with need  
13 for abasement ( $r = .27$ ). Reasoning with one's partner was associated  
14 with need for achievement ( $r = .30$ ). The tactic of avoiding one's part-  
15 ner was negatively related to both need for nurturance ( $r = -.33$ ), and  
16 the need for affiliation ( $r = -.33$ ). Withdrawal was also inversely re-  
17 lated to need for nurturance ( $r = -.27$ ). Finally, doing what one had  
18 planned to do anyway correlated significantly with need for change ( $r =$   
19  $.27$ ) and aggression ( $r = .27$ ).

#### 20 Power Use and Satisfaction

21 Correlations were computed between reported level of satisfaction  
22 and the relative use of the 26 power strategies. Level of satisfaction  
23 was measured on a 9-point scale (1 = very dissatisfied; 9 = very  
24 satisfied) and mean satisfaction for the whole sample was 6.72. Level  
25 of satisfaction correlated positively with the tactic of talking about

1 one's desires ( $r = .30, p < .01$ ), and negatively with four other tactics:  
2 inducing jealousy ( $r = -.33, p < .01$ ); doing what one wanted to do anyway  
3 ( $r = -.30, p < .01$ ); making one's partner feel guilty ( $r = -.22, p < .05$ );  
4 and avoiding one's partner ( $r = -.30, p < .01$ ).

5 In order to ascertain which combination of power tactics would best  
6 predict satisfaction within the dating dyad, a stepwise multiple regres-  
7 sion was computed. All 26 power strategies were entered as predictors.  
8 A multiple R of .49 was obtained on the basis of four strategies. Two  
9 of these strategies were positively weighted: talking about one's desire  
10 (beta = .34), and stating one has had more experience (beta = .17). Two  
11 of the strategies were negatively weighted: avoiding one's partner (beta  
12 = -.24), and asserting one's wishes loudly (beta = -.22).

#### 13 Discussion

14 The first question this study addressed was what types of power  
15 tactics are used most often in dating relationships. From the list of the  
16 most and least frequently used strategies, one can see that the preference  
17 was for non-coercive and negotiation-oriented power tactics. It can be  
18 inferred that these tactics might be the most available and successful  
19 in a voluntary, intimate relationship.

20 The second question was whether the type of power tactics used by a  
21 person could be predicted from his/her personality characteristics. The  
22 significant results from both the ACL need scales and the BSRI confirmed  
23 that this is possible. For example, the scores on the ACL need scales  
24 were associated in an intuitively logical manner with appropriate power  
25 tactics. Persons with low need for dominance preferred acting helpless  
in order to get their way, whereas persons high in the need for dominance

1 preferred telling their partner directly about their desires. The possi-  
2 bility that these results were due simply to the subjects responding in  
3 a consistent manner across questionnaires is untenable since there was  
4 a three-month span between filling out the ACL and the power tactic form.  
5 Rather, it appears that personality needs and preferred power tactics  
6 are associated.

7 The results of this study also indicate that the variations in  
8 preferred power use were better predicted by sex role than by sex. This  
9 finding supports the results of Falbo (1977b) who was studying differences  
10 in power tactics for people in general. Sex role significantly differ-  
11 entiated on six of the power strategies. Masculine persons preferred  
12 responses to tell their partners about their preferences more than did  
13 feminine persons. Androgynous persons (and masculine ones) preferred  
14 the tactic of reasoning more than did feminine persons. Androgynous (and  
15 feminine persons), however, preferred the tactic of talking out an issue.  
16 On the other strategies where sex role differences were found (loud asser-  
17 tion, putting the partner into a good mood, and stating one had more ex-  
18 perience), all of the significant differences could be explained by the  
19 low means of the undifferentiated persons.

20 It was noted in the introduction that Falbo and Peplau (1980) found  
21 that males preferred bilateral-direct strategies, and females unilateral-  
22 indirect. These findings were not supported in the present study, how-  
23 ever, as there were no significant sex differences. Regarding the sex  
24 role differences, the findings are also not confirmatory. Reasoning, which  
25 is a bilateral-direct strategy, was indeed preferred by androgynous and

1 masculine persons. However, talking which is also a bilateral-direct  
2 strategy was preferred by androgynous and feminine persons. Finally,  
3 telling the partner about your desires is a unilateral-direct strategy,  
4 and was preferred by masculine persons. It is appropriate to note that  
5 this lack of confirmation of the Falbo and Peplau findings is probably  
6 not due to differences in definitions between the two studies since the  
7 same phrases were used to describe the power strategies in both. It  
8 could be caused, however, by the differences in method.

9       The final question was whether the type of power tactics used by a  
10 person in a dating relationship is associated with the level of satis-  
11 faction within that relationship. The results from this study strongly  
12 support the findings of Falbo and Peplau (1980) that satisfaction is as-  
13 sociated with the use of direct strategies. High satisfaction was posi-  
14 tively associated with the direct strategy of telling one's desires to  
15 one's partner, and negatively with the indirect strategies of inducing  
16 jealousy or guilt, of avoiding the other person, and of doing what one  
17 wanted to do anyway. The results of the multiple regression also support  
18 this finding. Since two studies have now confirmed that there is a re-  
19 lationship between satisfaction and the type of power tactics used, it  
20 would be appropriate for further studies to take a longitudinal perspec-  
21 tive to determine the causal sequence. Also, the prediction of satisfaction  
22 in a relationship could probably be enhanced by including the power tactics  
23 preferred by the partner and by investigating the actual and perceived  
24 power behavior of both persons.  
25

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Table 1

## Power Strategies

1. I make a simple request. I ask him/her to do what I want.
2. I express negative feelings. I show that I am unhappy or upset.
3. I make subtle suggestions or drop hints.
4. I bargain or negotiate. I agree to do something for my partner if he/she will do something for me in return.
5. I try to make my partner jealous.
6. I simply tell him/her what I want.
7. I reason with him/her. I present my arguments logically.
8. I tell him/her how important it is to me.
9. I withdraw. I become silent, cold, or distant.
10. I just go ahead and do what I wanted to do anyway.
11. I repeatedly remind my partner of what I want until he/she gives in.
12. I try to do something real nice for him/her so that he/she will do something for me in return.
13. I try to persuade him/her that my way is right.
14. I threaten to leave the relationship.
15. I talk about what I want. We have a conversation and discuss our differences and needs.
16. I try to be in a particularly good mood. I smile a lot and/or try to be especially affectionate.
17. I use physical force to convince him/her of my position.
18. I act helpless and hope my partner will respond.
19. I avoid him/her. I just stay away.

Table 1 (continued)

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- 3 20. I cry when he/she is present.
- 4 21. I use deceit and/or tell white lies.
- 5 22. I make my partner feel as though my way was actually his/her idea.
- 6 23. I make my partner feel guilty in some way.
- 7 24. I tell him/her that I have had a lot of experience with such matters.
- 8 25. I try to put my partner in a good mood.
- 9 26. I assert my wishes very loudly.

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Table 2

## Power Tactic Preferences by Sex Role

| Power Tactic                              | Sex Roles   |           |          |                  |
|-------------------------------------------|-------------|-----------|----------|------------------|
|                                           | Androgynous | Masculine | Feminine | Undifferentiated |
| ***Reason with partner                    | 7.75a       | 7.09b     | 5.68a    | 3.80ab           |
| ***Talk about what want                   | 8.39ab      | 6.00b     | 6.47c    | 4.12ac           |
| **Tell partner about<br>one's desires     | 6.31        | 7.30ab    | 5.06b    | 5.07a            |
| **Put partner in a<br>good mood           | 5.12        | 6.24a     | 5.32b    | 3.28ab           |
| *Tell partner have had<br>more experience | 2.18a       | 1.23      | 2.05b    | .45ab            |
| *Assert one's wishes<br>loudly            | 1.71        | 1.87a     | .97      | .43a             |

abc Means with same subscripts are significantly different from each other at the  $p < .05$  level.

\* $p < .05$

\*\* $p < .01$

\*\*\* $p < .001$